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Notes

[Contributions in the form of notes or discussions should be sent to John A. Scott, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.]

THE ASSUMED INFERIORITY OF LITERARY BORROWINGS

It is a dogma of higher literary criticism that when you have both the original and the adaptation, the adaptation can at once be detected by its lack of power or its general unfitness. This has been the basis for much of the arguments against certain books of Homer in which ideas similar to those found in other books are supposed to be badly expressed or less relevant than in the supposedly earlier books.

This argument is based on a wrong idea, as the two following familiar illustrations will show. In the *Odyssey* ix. 58 Odysseus tells how he and his companions warded off the Cicones during the morning, but toward evening they were forced to yield to superior numbers. The phrase which denotes late afternoon is very striking and beautiful:

ἥμος δ' ἥελιος μετενίσσεται βουλυτόνδε.

This has been imitated by Milton in the *Comus*, in the superb verses:

Two such I saw, what time the labored ox
In his loose traces from the furrow came.

What a wonderful use of the word βουλυτόνδε! It is impossible for one with his English speech fully to grasp the beauties of the Homeric word, but it seems to me that Milton has fairly surpassed his original.

However we have in our literature other illustrations which seem to me utterly to demolish this canon of literary criticism.

Shakespeare had not read Plutarch in the Greek, but relied on a perfectly familiar translation, a translation which may be found in any good library. In the *Brutus*, chap. xxxix, after discussing the reasons which had induced the others to join in the slaying of Caesar, Plutarch says:

And in a manner they did all confess that they fought for the tyranny, and to be lords of the empire of Rome. And in contrary manner, his enemies themselves did never reprove Brutus, for any such change or desire. For, it was said that Antonius spake it openly diverse times that he thought that of all of them that had slain Caesar, there was none but Brutus only that was moved to do it, as thinking the act commendable of itself: but that all the other conspirators did conspire his death for some private malice or envy, that they otherwise did bear unto him.

These ideas reappear in Shakespeare in the last act of *Julius Caesar* as follows:

This was the noblest Roman of them all:
All the conspirators save only he
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;
He only, in a general honest thought
And common good to all, made one of them.
His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, "This was a man!"

Here we have the same ideas, often the same words, yet the difference is hardly to be measured, and the commonplaces of Plutarch become the sublimest poetry in Shakespeare. I might have selected other scenes to illustrate my argument, but this is so brief and so certain that it should destroy the doctrine that in descriptions of like scenes or in the narrations of like events we can detect the original and the adaptation because of the mechanical or literary inferiority of the adaptation.

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MATTHEW ARNOLD'S INTERPRETATION OF *ODYSSEY* iv. 563

In order to illustrate the directness of expression which he regarded as characteristic of Homeric poetry Matthew Arnold said: "The effect of this allusive and compressed manner is often very powerful, Horace is full of it; but wherever it exists, it is always an un-Homeric effect. 'The losses of the heavens fresh moons speedily repair; we, when we have gone down where the pious Aeneas, where the rich Tullus and Ancus are,—pulvis et umbra sumus,' says Horace, *Odes* iv. 7. 13. But Homer, when he has to speak of going down to the grave, says, definitely, ἐς Ἡλύσιον πεδῖον . . . ἀθάνατοι πέμψουσιν.¹" Here it seems to me the great critic has completely missed the meaning of the passage in the *Odyssey* which he quotes to show the directness with which Homer expresses the idea of death or "going down to the grave," for in those very words Menelaus was assured that he was not to die. The entire context is as follows:

δ. 561: σοὶ δ' οὐ θέσφατόν ἐστι, διοτρεφὲς ὦ Μενέλαε,
"Ἀργεῖ ἐν ἱπποβότῳ θανέειν καὶ πότμον ἐπισπῆν,
'ἀλλὰ σ' ἐς Ἡλύσιον πεδῖον καὶ πείρατα γαίης
ἀθάνατοι πέμψουσιν.

569: οὐνεκ' ἔχεις Ἑλένην καὶ σφιν γαμβρὸς Διὸς ἐσσι.

"It is not destined for thee, O Zeus-nourished Menelaus, to die in horse-raising Argos and to meet thy doom, but the gods will escort thee to the Elysian plain and the borders of the earth, since thou hast Helen for thy wife and in their sight thou art the son-in-law of Zeus."

¹ On *Translating Homer*, Lecture III, p. 9.